

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 2026

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EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, SL

SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS: COUNTRY ACTION PLAN FOR SIERRA LEONE

REF: STATE 147783

1. POST WISHES TO COMMEND DESK FOR SENSITIVE AND PERCEPTIVE REVIEW OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITION IN SIERRA LEONE AND FOR PROPOSING PRAGMATIC PLAN OF ACTION.

2. EMBASSY COMMENTS ON DRAFT ARE AS FOLLOWS:

A. GENERAL

(1) SIERRA LEONE'S RECORD FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IS GENERALLY GOOD BY WESTERN STANDARDS AND RANKS HIGH WHEN COMPARED TO OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES. ACCORDING TO AN INFORMAL POLL OF AMERICAN AMBASSADORS TAKEN AT THE RECENT CHIEF OF MISSION CONFERENCE IN ABIDJAN, SIERRA LEONE'S RECORD WAS JUDGED TO BE QUITE HIGH AMONG SOME TWENTY AFRICAN COUNTRIES WHOSE HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS WERE CONSIDERED. ITS RECORD WITH REGARD TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS, SUCH AS FREEDOM OF RELIGION, ABSENCE OF RACIAL OR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND ADHERENCE TO DUE PROCESS OF LAW ARE ALUDABLE. THE POST KNOWS OF NO CASE WHERE TORTURE OR OTHER CRUEL, INHUMAN OR DEGRADING PUNISHMENTS HAVE BEEN APPLIED.

(2) GOVERNMENT POLICY IS TO TRY TO IMPROVE THE LIVING STANDARDS OF THE PEOPLE OF SIERRA LEONE. FUNDS DEVOTED TO EDUCATION CONSTITUTE
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OVER 23 PERCENT OF THE FY1977/78 APPROPRIATION, WHILE HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMPRISE A FURTHER 10 PERCENT. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT RIGHTLY CAN BE CRITICIZED FOR INCIDENTS OF MISMANAGEMENT, IN-EFFICIENCY, AND ON OCCASION ALLEGED CORRUPTION, THESE SAME TRAITS AFFECT THE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE AND BLAME SHOULD NOT BE DIRECTED SOLELY AT THE GOVERNMENT.

(3) PRESIDENT STEVENS AND OTHER POLITICAL LEADERS DID MANIPULATE

SIERRA LEONE INSTITUTIONS FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES, PARTICULARLY THE INFORMATIONAL SERVICES. HOWEVER, WELL KNOWN AUTHORS OF SEVERAL WIDELY CIRCULATED PRIVATE TRACTS CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT STEVENS NEITHER HAVE BEEN MOLESTED OR IMPRISONED. A DISTINCTION MUST BE MADE BETWEEN ARBITRARY ARREST AND DETENTION. UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE CONSTITUTION OF SIERRA LEONE, PARLIAMENT CAN PROCLAIM A STATE OF EMERGENCY. WHEN SUCH A STATE IS PROCLAIMED THE PRESIDENT CAN ORDER THE DETENTION OF INDIVIDUALS WITHOUT THE FILING OF FORMAL CHARGES OR THE RIGHT TO THE DETAINEE OF THE PROCESS OF HABEAS CORPUS. HOWEVER, THIS RIGHT OF DETENTION DOES NOT EXTEND TO INDIVIDUAL POLICE OFFICERS, UNLESS IN POSSESSION OF A WRITTEN DETENTION ORDER SIGNED BY THE PRESIDENT. POLICE OFFICERS WHO ARREST INDIVIDUALS MUST STILL FILE CHARGES AND FULL LEGAL PROTECTION IS ACCORDED THE ACCUSED. DURING THE DISTURBANCES IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH SOME POLICE ATTEMPTED TO DETAIN INDIVIDUALS, PARTICULARLY STUDENTS AND TEACHERS, UNDER THE PROVISION OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY. PUBLIC AND LEGAL PRESSURE, AS WELL AS THE PRESIDENT'S REFUSAL TO INVOKE THE DETENTION PROVISIONS IN MOST OF THESE CASES RESULTED IN THE FREEING OF ALMOST ALL SUCH DETAINEES.

B. SPECIFIC

(1) PARA 4-A(1). AT PRESENT APPROXIMATELY 100 PERSONS ARE IN DETENTION UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, THREE ARE ELECTED SLPP PARLIAMENTARIANS. ONE OF THESE THREE MAY BE CHARGED WITH MURDER. WE ARE UNCERTAIN HOW MANY OF THE REMAINDER EVENTUALLY MAY HAVE CRIMINAL CHARGES PREFERRED AGAINST THEM.
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(2) PARA 4-A(2). RESTRICTIONS ARE IMPOSED FOR TRAVEL TO THE DIAMOND MINING CENTERS IN KONO DISTRICT. THESE RESTRICTIONS ARE NOT POLITICAL AND PERMISSION FOR DIPLOMATIC TRAVEL IS OBTAINED EASILY THROUGH THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

(3) PARA 4-A(3). THE CORRUPTION WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT MIRRORS THAT OF THE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE. HOWEVER, WE QUESTION WHETHER THIS GOVERNMENT IS MORE CORRUPT THAN THOSE IN MANY OTHER AFRICAN NATIONS. WE SUSPECT PART OF THIS PERCEPTION STEMS FROM THE WILLINGNESS OF LOCAL CONTACTS TO DISCUSS RUMORS OF OTHER PEOPLE'S CORRUPTION. GOVERNMENT HAS TIGHTENED ITS BELT SIGNIFICANTLY, AT LEAST ON PAPER. PROJECTED BUDGET DEFICIT FOR FY1977/78 IS LE12 MILLION VS. LAST YEAR'S LE45.5 MILLION. CORRUPTION AND FRIVOLOUS EXPENDITURES PLAY FAR LESS A ROLE IN BLOCKING THE ADVANCE OF LIVING STANDARDS THAN DOES THE ANTIQUATED AND PERSONNEL LADEN BUREAUCRATIC STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT. THE GOVERNMENT HAS ESTABLISHED A PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION TO REFORM THIS BUREAUCRACY, BUT ITS DELIBERATIONS ARE AGONIZINGLY SLOW.

(4) PARA 5-B(1). THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DISCUSSED ARE DIRECTED ALMOST ENTIRELY TOWARD THE MAINTENANCE IN POWER OF THE RULING APC GOVERNMENT. NORMAL POLITICAL RIVALRIES ARE EXACERBATED BY THE FACT THAT THE TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE COUNTRY ARE TRIBALLY AND REGIONALLY BASED WITH A LONG HISTORY OF TRIBAL

ANTAGONISM. TRIBAL AND REGIONAL DOMINANCE AND NOT POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY ARE THE HEART OF SIERRA LEONE'S POLITICAL DYNAMICS.
WERE THE SLPP IN POWER ITS ACTIONS TO PRECLUDE THE APC FROM
GAINING DOMINANCE WOULD BE SIMILAR TO THOSE UNDERTAKEN BY THE APC
AND SOME SELF-EXILED SIERRA LEONEANS WHO PROTEST THE ALLEGED
ABUSES THE LOUDEST WOULD BE IN THE FOREFRONT OF THOSE IN-
STIGATING THE SAME ABUSES. NORTH

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